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Air Force Plans 'Seeing' Satellite by Spring of 1959

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Missile Chief Says Vehicle Has Recoverable Capsule
--Trudeau in Gavin Post --by John D. Morris
Special to The NYT

Washington, Jan 14--The Air Force hopes to launch a military reconnaissance satellite with a recoverable capsule by the spring of 1959.

It plans to put a test vehicle into orbit by next October, using the Thor intermediate range ballistic missile as a booster.

Authority to move into the final development stage of the hitherto-secret project was obtained "just several months ago," according to Maj. Gen. Bernard A. Schriever, commander of the Air Force Ballistic Missile Division.

He gave the Senate Preparedness subcommittee the details at a closed hearing last Thursday. A heavily censored transcript of his testimony became available today.

***** para on Gavin being replaced by Trapnell as Army R&D.

Could Give Military Data

The transcript of the space project, as declassified by the Pentagon, gave no information on the size or purpose of the detachable capsule that presumably would be shot back to earth from a reconnaissance satellite.

However, according to informed speculation it is theoretically possible to equip such a compartment with photographic or infra-red equipment that could provide pictures or data of military value.

For example, the recovered device might indicate the location of secret industrial concentrations of missile launching sites in the Soviet Union.

Pentagon officials would not elaborate on Gen. Schriever's disclosure except to say that the Air Force had been working since 1946 "toward a capability" of manned space flight. They said that the project was highly secret.

Gen. Schriever said that the recon satellite program went back to 1946, when the Air Force retained the Rand Corporation, a

private research concern, to study the feasibility of putting an earth satellite into orbit.

The Rand Corporation "made specific recommendations to the Air Force about 1953 that the time had come to actually go into a systems program," he testified.

Putting development on "systems" basis means to bring together for testing the various components such as the launching vehicle and the orbiting device.

"We have just several months ago for the first time got sufficient funds to proceed on this on a systems basis," General Schriever said. "Prior to that we were working on a component basis."

While there was "a lot of interest at different sources in the Government for an advanced reconnaissance system," he recalled, "we got no approval for proceeding with this on a systems basis either on the Air Force secretarial level or at the Department of Defense secretarial level until just recently."

The approval apparently was given shortly before the first Soviet earth satellite was launched Oct. 4. Since then, "there has of course been a desire to accelerate this program," General Schriever testified.

As a consequence, he added, he gave verbal instructions, which "will be carried out in contractual terms," to adopt the Thor, a 1,500-mile missile, as the launching device.

"We think...that we can get before the end of this year, say some time around perhaps as early as July, but more likely about October, we can get, an orbiting vehicle with the Thor as booster, which would be a boost to this program here," he said. "In other words, we would be getting experience, we would be getting some of the components in flight, and so forth."

He indicated that subsequent test satellites would use a second-stage engine as well as the Thor. He then started to discuss plans for "early 1959, some time by the spring, and we have not firmed up on these dates yet , but I have given instructions to proceed with this program."

The rest of the passage was censored.

The weight and size of the various test satellites and of the final reconnaissance vehicle were deleted from the declassified

testimony. It is known, however, that the Air Force proposed to launch a half-ton satellite as part of the International Geophysical Year, which ends in 1958, but was not permitted to participate in the program.

At a closed session today, the Senate subcommittee heard Gen. Nathan F. Twining, chairman of the JCS, advise against hasty action to reorganize the Defense Department.

Senator John Stennis, Dem. of Miss., who presided as vice chairman of the subcommittee, said that Gen Twining had given an optimistic report on the comparative military strength of the United States and the Soviet Union.

Today's defense investigation activities at the Capitol included the appearance by Neil H. McElroy, Secretary of Defense, before a secret session of the House Armed Services Committee.